

**MIKE BARTLETT**

# BULL



N  
H  
B

Mike Bartlett

# **BULL**



NICK HERN BOOKS

London

[www.nickhernbooks.co.uk](http://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk)

## **Contents**

[Title Page](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Original Production](#)

[Characters](#)

[\*Bull\*](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright and Performing Rights Information](#)

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to: Daniel Bates, Daniel Evans, Soutra Gilmour, Neil McPherson, and particularly, Clare Lizzimore.

*M.B.*

*Bull* was first performed at the Crucible Studio Theatre, Sheffield, on 6 February 2013. The cast was as follows:

TONY	Adam James
CARTER	Adrian Lukis
ISOBEL	Eleanor Matsuura
THOMAS	Sam Troughton

<i>Director</i>	Clare Lizzimore
<i>Designer</i>	Soutra Gilmour
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Peter Mumford
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Christopher Shutt

## **Characters**

THOMAS

ISOBEL

TONY

CARTER

*The audience is raked down towards the actors.*

*There should be a minimum of scenery, props and furniture, in order to keep the focus on the drama of the scene.*

*( / ) means the next speech begins at that point.*

*( – ) means the next line interrupts.*

*(...) at the end of a speech means it trails off. On its own it indicates a pressure, expectation or desire to speak.*

*A line with no full stop at the end indicates that the next speech follows on immediately.*

*A speech with no written dialogue indicates a character deliberately remaining silent.*

*Blank space between speeches in the dialogue indicates a silence equal to the length of the space.*

*This ebook was created before the end of rehearsals and so may differ slightly from the play as performed.*

ISOBEL            You've got...

THOMAS        What?

ISOBEL            You've got something just...

THOMAS        What?

ISOBEL            No the other side.

THOMAS        There?

ISOBEL            Yes. No it's still there.

THOMAS        Gone? Has it gone now?

ISOBEL            Well...

THOMAS        Where is he?

ISOBEL            He's coming. Look at you.

THOMAS        What? What are you talking about?

ISOBEL            Step left step right –

THOMAS        Stop it.

ISOBEL            – dancing all over the room. Calm down.

THOMAS        I am calm. I'm standing perfectly still.

ISOBEL            You are now. But before you were like a spaz in a sweet shop. Oo oo oo.

THOMAS        Stop criticising me.

                    I'm very cool about all this.



ISOBEL            You're not cool about anything.

THOMAS          It's just one of those days, one of those meetings you know, there's no reason to be particularly fussed about it.

ISOBEL            now you're fussed

THOMAS          I mean he's just a man, isn't he?

ISOBEL            I believe so.

THOMAS          With a job to do.

ISOBEL            Did you wear that deliberately?

THOMAS          Did I wear what deliberately?

ISOBEL            Your suit.

THOMAS          Yes I wore my suit deliberately yes, I didn't accidentally wear it, what would that even mean –

ISOBEL            It means your suit looks cheap.

THOMAS          Yeah. Well. I didn't wear it for you.

ISOBEL            No I think you wore it because you think it's your best one, but actually I think the other one, the one you wear every day, I think that's better.

THOMAS          You really are a bitch.

ISOBEL            Hey.  
Hey.  
I'm just saying, since we're waiting, since we're making conversation best as we can, I'm simply saying your suit isn't as *great* as you think it is. That's allowed. Expressing my opinion. Your suit, whether you like it or not, is a talking point. I'm not being *a bitch*. You should be grateful I was making conversation at all.

THOMAS          You've never liked me.

ISOBEL           Where the fuck is this coming from?

TONY            Are we ready?

THOMAS         We look ready don't we? Stupid fucking question.

TONY            Is he going to wear that suit?

THOMAS         For fuck's –

ISOBEL          Yes he is.

THOMAS         TALK TO ME! I'm here. Look.

TONY            Why isn't he wearing his best one?

ISOBEL          This is what I was / saying.

THOMAS         This is my best one.

TONY            Oh right. Really?

ISOBEL          Look you see you have to accept it now, I'm not fucking with you, your suit will count against you. And Tony agrees so –

THOMAS         Alright, I won't make an effort next time.

ISOBEL          I don't think there'll be a next time. Not for you. I mean from my point of view your suit is good news. Your suit is exactly what I want to see you wearing. Means I'm one up before we've begun. I was just trying to be nice.

THOMAS         He should be here. Have you heard anything from him?

TONY            What?

THOMAS         We're in the same room. You heard what I said. So why did you just say what?

TONY            What?

THOMAS I said had you heard anything and instead of replying you said what? So it wasn't that you didn't hear me, it's implying a contempt for my question.

TONY What?

THOMAS I could hit you sometimes.

TONY Why would he call me?

THOMAS You're the team leader. Officially anyway.

TONY Officially oo owch I'm offended. No. He knows the time we're meeting so why would he call? He's always on time. He knows we'll be here, I don't understand your question. Hence my reply: 'What?'

ISOBEL It's still there.

THOMAS What?

ISOBEL The thing. Just...

THOMAS Where? I thought you said it was...

ISOBEL Yeah but it kind of –

THOMAS Have you got a mirror?

ISOBEL Sorry.

THOMAS Yeah if I looked like you I wouldn't bother either.

ISOBEL A compliment. Thank you.

THOMAS I meant –

ISOBEL I know what you meant.

There's a mirror in the bathroom.

Thomas?

You know where the bathroom is?

THOMAS      Yeah but I don't want to leave do I? In case he gets here when I'm gone. So.

ISOBEL      Okay  
Fine.

Fine.

...but I really think you should have a look.  
Right?

TONY        Yeah.

ISOBEL      I mean it's... it's really... isn't it?

TONY        Yeah mate, mate's favour, it's really...

THOMAS      Okay.  
I see.  
You're fucking with me.

ISOBEL      On your head be it.  
Literally.

THOMAS      You really are not sexy I want to say that. You should know that.

ISOBEL      Thank you Thomas, but your opinion is one of the least important.

THOMAS      So fucking icy. I could take you to a country hotel and put you in front of the fire, leave you all night, and I guarantee you'd still be as fucking frozen as you are right now. Icy, hard. Tight.

TONY        Tight. Isobel. He said tight.

ISOBEL      I know, what a weird thing to say, what do you mean tight?

THOMAS      Tight. Anal. You're sucked up. It's like you're keeping

everything in. Tight. Tight. Tight.

ISOBEL           Go on.

THOMAS        I mean that in the unlikely event of anyone trying to fuck you Isobel they'd knock and they'd knock but there's no one at home is there? Not in that department. I have a feeling the door has been shut so long, you don't know if it opens. Probably don't even know where the door is.

ISOBEL        Jesus Tony what can he mean? I think it's a metaphor of *some kind* but...

TONY           You know that thing about the suit?

THOMAS        Yes.

TONY           I was messing with you.

THOMAS        Right.

TONY           I was standing outside, I heard your conversation. Heard what you were talking about.

THOMAS        Okay.

TONY           Thought it would be funny to join in.

THOMAS        Okay.

So the suit – ?

TONY           The suit's fine.

THOMAS        Okay.

And have I got something on my head?

TONY           Yeah. That's true, you have. It's just, on the right.  
No. No. The right.

No. Sorry mate.  
It's still...  
It's quite distracting.  
Where were you born?

THOMAS      What?

TONY          You heard me. Or was that contempt?

THOMAS      Contempt.

TONY          So?

THOMAS      Why do you want to know?

TONY          Why are you so cagey?

THOMAS      I'm not cagey, I'm careful, I'm careful with you because of what you do all the time.

TONY          What we do all the time I have no idea what you're talking about I'm just making conversation here just asking a really simple question basic kind of simple kind of thing you say and yet and yet still no sign of an answer from you.

THOMAS

TONY          Is there? Still no... sign... just standing there looking like a startled sheep or something.

THOMAS      Ringwood

TONY          I'm sorry?

THOMAS      Where I was born.

TONY          Ringwood.

THOMAS      Yeah.

TONY          That's in the New Forest yes?

THOMAS      Why?

TONY          Why is it in the New Forest, don't know.

THOMAS      Why did you ask where I'm born?

TONY          What did your father do?

THOMAS      Why are you suddenly asking me these questions, you're such a couple of shits.

ISOBEL       I haven't spoken in what, a minute?

TONY          What did he do?  
Your dad?

THOMAS      I'm not saying.

TONY          Is it embarrassing or something?

THOMAS      I'm keeping my life to myself why would I tell you two?  
You'd use it against me.

TONY          Against you? Thomas. Come on. What is this? Jesus.  
We're just making conversation. We're just talking. That's a nice thing for us to do.

ISOBEL       This is what I was saying.

TONY          You take everything so seriously. Fuck.  
I mean we could all sit in silence if you'd rather.

THOMAS      He was a maths teacher.

TONY          A maths teacher?

THOMAS      What?

TONY          Funny.

THOMAS      What did yours do?

TONY          He's a surgeon.

THOMAS      What? He still is?

TONY          Still is. Yep. Still got hands, steady as a rock. Silver fox I think he is these days, nurses they love him, he tells me these stories when we're in the pub or out walking, he's still very fit, very youthful, tells me these stories when we go, play golf together. But yours, you said he was a maths teacher – was – so he must be... older. Than mine. You said he's not a maths teacher any more, so you mean he's now... what? Retired?

THOMAS      Dead.

TONY          Oh.  
Oh. I'm sorry to hear that.

THOMAS      I really don't want to talk about this?

TONY          What did he die of?

Was it maths?

Cos I hate maths.

THOMAS      What did your dad do?

ISOBEL

THOMAS

ISOBEL      ...



THOMAS       ?

ISOBEL        Me.

THOMAS       What?

ISOBEL        He did me. He abused me.

THOMAS

ISOBEL

THOMAS       I don't believe a fucking word you say.

ISOBEL        Oh how sympathetic. Thank you Thomas tell you this thing this secret that's actually quite personal actually? And you're just –

THOMAS       If it was true you wouldn't just come out and say it like that, like 'I was abused' you'd be more...

ISOBEL        More?

THOMAS       ...

ISOBEL        You want me to be ashamed of it, you're telling me how to behave?

THOMAS       You're a lying cow / this is –

ISOBEL        You want me to hide it?

THOMAS       Do you know if that's true?

TONY          What?

THOMAS       That.

TONY          Yeah I know if it's true.

THOMAS       And?

TONY          You're being quite insensitive.

Her father used to come into her room when she was a child and do things to her, she'll tell you the details if you want, but trust me you don't want. She told me all about it. When she did, when she told me, it made my eyes water. Not with tears. With pain Thomas, with excruciating hurt.

THOMAS      Well... alright. If it's true, then I'm really so very very sorry to hear it, it must've been *awful* Isobel, the flowers are on their way, believe me, but even if it isn't complete crap I can't think why you would bring it up now other than to *use* it.

ISOBEL      *Use* it?

THOMAS      Yeah.

ISOBEL      I'm sorry I'm going to have to leave in a minute.

THOMAS      Yeah yeah. Alright.  
I believe you.  
Okay?

Whatever you want.

ISOBEL      Maybe now you can see why your tight comment earlier was a bit offensive?

If I am tight, maybe there's a reason.

THOMAS      It's no excuse for being a bitch now.

ISOBEL      You always call me a bitch, you never say anything about him.

TONY      My dad isn't a surgeon Thomas. He was a taxman.

THOMAS

TONY      Retired.  
I lied.

He's not youthful at all.  
He sits in a chair most of the time. We hardly speak.

ISOBEL        See?  
                  See?  
                  He's always playing with you and you never stand up to him. Be a man, have some fucking balls, then someone might find you attractive.  
                  At last.  
                  Thomas.  
                  You might suddenly become a bit just even a bit, impressive.  
                  They might keep you on.

THOMAS       I don't need advice.

ISOBEL        Stop staring at the floor, stop shuffling around like an autistic penguin. Don't pick your teeth. Don't hunch. Stand up to him, stand up straight, smile a bit, you never know, you might win.  
  
                  I mean you won't.  
  
                  But you might.

THOMAS       What did I do? There must've been a day, ages ago, when I did something to you two. That pissed you off.

ISOBEL        No.

THOMAS       And after that you decided to make my life –

ISOBEL        No there was never a day like that.

TONY          This again. Look mate, Thomas, mate, me and her, we're both very normal people, honestly this isn't a thing against you, you have to understand that, you seem to have it in

your head that we're always attacking you, and we're not.  
We're really not.

Promise.

Really.

Promise.

ISOBEL            It's paranoia.

THOMAS          Paranoia. Right.

ISOBEL            Do you have history of mental illness in your family?

THOMAS          Actually...

ISOBEL            Yes?

THOMAS          My mother died of Alzheimer's.

ISOBEL            That's a bit sick.

THOMAS          What?

ISOBEL            Making that up.

THOMAS          And making up some abuse story isn't?

ISOBEL            I wasn't.

Making. It up.

But this Alzheimer's thing –

THOMAS          What?

ISOBEL            Come on.

THOMAS

ISOBEL

THOMAS      How did you know?

ISOBEL      You twitch. Your right eyebrow.

It gets worse when you lie. Like Pinocchio's nose.

TONY      Apparently with the last lot that had to do this, they had a few drinks, he asked them questions, they had a few more, he kept asking, you see he's old-fashioned in that way, respects people who can hold their drink, who can mix business with pleasure cos as he sees it that's where the real work is done, so it's the way he likes to choose. He calls it doing his weeding.

THOMAS      Really.

TONY      Oh but you don't drink do you?

THOMAS      As if you forgot.

TONY      I'm sure he won't mind if you don't take part.

THOMAS      Of course he'll mind. If that's the assessment. *If* that's how he decides. Of course he'll –

ISOBEL      Would you drink if that was how he chose? If that was actually how it was done, would you sacrifice your morals for staying on here?

THOMAS      Yeah of course it's not –

ISOBEL      So this whole not drinking thing, this is –

THOMAS      I've never drunk I prefer it that way. But it's not a thing, if I had to –

TONY                Yeah but if you've never drunk, and then you did, even one, you'd be out and under in seconds it would be a mess, Thomas, nah you would do much better to say sorry sir I don't drink.

THOMAS            Why do you hate me?

TONY                We... jesus! Okay alright, whatever you want to think yeah we hate you, okay.

ISOBEL             Do you have a girlfriend?

THOMAS            I've just realised...

ISOBEL             You don't right?

THOMAS            All the stuff I thought I knew you could've made it all up couldn't you?

TONY                Could've done yeah.

THOMAS            So like I think you live in a top-floor flat, in the centre of town, and in the basement car park you keep a Porsche that was a present from your uncle, and your girlfriend is called Cindy who lives in Paris and works as a model, and you trained as an architect but gave it up and five years ago got your pilot's licence. But now I'm saying it out loud all that it sounds...

TONY                Unconvincing.  
Yeah.  
Doesn't it?

ISOBEL             You're very strangely proportioned Thomas, I mean physically.

THOMAS            And you. You as well. You could be anyone.

ISOBEL             I asked you a question.  
Thomas.

THOMAS      What?

ISOBEL      Girlfriend?

THOMAS      Why?  
Are you offering?

ISOBEL      Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha.  
No. I wasn't offering.

THOMAS      Do you know something?

ISOBEL      Something? What?

THOMAS      You look like you –

ISOBEL      If I knew something why would I ask?

THOMAS      No. I don't have a girlfriend.

ISOBEL      No I can't imagine the sort of girl who'd –

TONY      Have you printed out your sales figures?

THOMAS      I...  
No.

TONY      Okay.

THOMAS      What?

TONY      Nothing.

THOMAS      Have you?

TONY      Of course.

THOMAS      You think he'll want the sales figures?

TONY      Possible isn't it, given the nature of the meeting?

ISOBEL      Likely I'd say.

THOMAS      You as well?

ISOBEL      Absolutely. Why? What have you done?

THOMAS      I thought this was just a preliminary chat.

ISOBEL      Did you?

TONY        Did you?

Look... Thomas.

We've both not only printed out our individual and collective sales figures, but we've completed a report on this first six months.

ISOBEL      See?

TONY        Haven't you?

THOMAS      When did you decide on this?

TONY        Tuesday, I think we... yes, spoke about it...

THOMAS      Not the fucking figures, the idea that if you work together you two will be through and I'll be the one who'll go.

TONY        You think there's a plan? That we sat down, Isobel and me at some point and said if we really undermine this little one, this one who has strangely shaped shoulders, if we just dent his confidence all the time, then he'll fuck up and we'll go through.

THOMAS      Exactly.

ISOBEL      You think we get on? Him and me? I hate him even more than you.

I mean yes, you're like any physically odd man, talking too much, strange gestures, yapping away, does get annoying,



but essentially you're harmless. He on the other hand is a fucking predator. He's hard and fast. He's incredibly selfish. He runs marathons so he can sleep with the charity workers. He is in fact desperate to sleep with me, which I don't want to do, not that I wouldn't, I mean if you look at his torso, he's built like a shithouse, we should do that actually show him your torso in a minute...

TONY                   Fine.

ISOBEL               But unfortunately for me, and Tony, I can't sleep with him because of my problem that we discussed earlier. But he did sleep with my friend Julie – took her for a ride in both senses, told her all this stuff he said he felt, then left her, she was very upset, thought she'd found Mr Right. That same month he went behind my back on the Stratton deal, you remember that one I had, he went straight behind my back and clinched it. I mean he's a real threat. And you should hear how he treats me when you're not there. When you're not there him and me, we're like a bear and a lion. I wouldn't trust him as far as I can throw him and I can't throw him Thomas that's obvious. We don't get on at all.

Go on then. Show him your torso.

TONY                   Right.

THOMAS              What are you doing? Fuck's sake. What if Carter comes in?

TONY                   He won't. He called earlier and said he was running twenty minutes late.

THOMAS              You said he hadn't called.

TONY                   I asked you why he would. I didn't say he hadn't.

THOMAS

TONY                   Stand up then.

THOMAS               I don't want to see your fucking *torso*.

TONY                   Come on, up up up. Uppy uppy uppy. Isobel help him

THOMAS               Don't fucking touch me.

ISOBEL                Hey alright you prick you don't hit women yeah, your mum teach you that?

TONY                   Stand up or we'll be nasty to you.

THOMAS               You are being nasty.

TONY                   Really nasty.

THOMAS               ...

TONY                   Now.

ISOBEL                See what I mean. Shithouse. Should be his name. Tony Shithouse. Look.

                          Not an inch of goodness. Sheer muscular wanker. Not like you, flabby little thing aren't you? Lots of goodness in you. But this one. Different kettle of fish. He's boiled down. He's a piranha.

TONY                   Touch it.

THOMAS                I'm not doing this. Put it down.

TONY                   Touch it! Go on.

THOMAS      If I touch it you'll both sit down?

TONY          Promise.

Now put your whole hand on it.

THOMAS      You said.

TONY          I lied.

THOMAS      ...

TONY          Okay okay, this time, if you put your whole hand on it,  
we'll really sit down. Leave you alone. Really. Won't we?

ISOBEL        Yeah.

TONY          Now your face.

THOMAS      Okay, fuck you, we're not at school.

ISOBEL        I will.

THOMAS      I've got other things to think about right now. Today might  
not matter to you but I'm –

TONY          Come on Thomas this is just fun, it's what we're saying  
lighten up.

ISOBEL        If I do it, will you do it afterwards?

THOMAS      And then we'll all sit down?

ISOBEL        Yeah.

THOMAS      Fine.

ISOBEL      Mmmmmmmmm.

Go on then. Your turn.

THOMAS      No. Actually no, I don't have to do this.

ISOBEL      You made me a deal.

THOMAS      It doesn't mean anything. Put your face against his chest  
what the fuck is that. What the fuck is put your face against  
his chest Oh I know let's play that game, put your face  
against his chest. No. No. I've had enough.

ISOBEL      He said he'd do it.

TONY      I know.

ISOBEL      And now you're what? Going back on it.

THOMAS      Yeah I'm going back on it. I'm really sorry. I apologise  
*profusely*.

TONY      She said if she did it, you'd do it that was the deal.

THOMAS      I'm backing out of the deal.

TONY      You can't.

THOMAS      I have.

TONY      You can't.

THOMAS      So come on that's – we've only got five minutes now

before he comes what else is there you haven't told me, is there anything else apart from the fact he's running late is there any other bits of information you're supposed to –

TONY Er... Thomas. We're talking to you. We've still got an issue to resolve.

THOMAS ...

TONY As your team leader, I don't like my colleagues playing stupid buggers with each other making promises they don't keep. So come over here and put your face against my chest.

THOMAS Don't start using all that, you know I don't give a shit about any of that team-leader stuff. You have no authority over me. In a minute Carter is going to come in here and pick two of us to carry on. Send one of us out. Are you really going to explain to him what the problem is? Do you want to say Mr Carter, Isobel put her face against my chest on the understanding that Thomas would do the same and now he won't. You say that, you'll sound about five years old. Won't you?

ISOBEL I'm really surprised.

TONY I know.

ISOBEL We were just having fun.

TONY He doesn't get it does he?

ISOBEL You seem to be one of those people, I can imagine you at school never really getting on with the other kids, always

on the outside, when the lights go out on the trip you want to go straight to sleep, you get upset with the others for talking, they all bunk off physics, you're the only one that goes in, is that what it was like?

Yeah I can see that. In your uniform. Problem with being a little man, isn't it. You wear short trousers your whole life.

THOMAS        I'm not –

TONY            So are you going to do this or not?

THOMAS        Are you still talking about it?

TONY            I'm standing here with my shirt up waiting.

THOMAS        No. I'm not.

TONY            Unbelievable.

What a prick.

ISOBEL          Oh look, I have got a mirror.

Do you want to borrow it?

THOMAS        No.

ISOBEL          You should.

You really should.

Cos you've still got something...

THOMAS        Shut up.

ISOBEL          Shut up. Right. Right.

TONY            Why did your dad call you Thomas?  
Was he a Christian?  
It's not a very nice name. Is it?  
Thomas.  
Doubting Thomas. Thomas. I suppose you don't notice it  
because most people called Thomas call themselves Tom,  
which is fine, which is just a normal name. But you  
actually want to be called Thomas. I find that surprising.  
Why don't you want to be Tom?

THOMAS        I've always been Thomas.

TONY            At school.

THOMAS        Yeah. I like it. I think it's more...

TONY            More...

THOMAS        I think it's better.

TONY            No no... more...

THOMAS        What?

TONY            More...?

More...?

THOMAS        Distinguished. Than Tom. Yes?

TONY            Distinguished. Huh.

Distinguished.

Distinguished.

THOMAS Tony's a stupid name.

Sounds old.

TONY Old? No.

ISOBEL I've always liked Tony as a name.

TONY Thank you. I've always liked Isobel.

ISOBEL Thank you.

THOMAS I've always liked Isobel.

ISOBEL Are you coming on to me?

THOMAS Why me? He said he liked it too.

ISOBEL He was coming on to me.

THOMAS

ISOBEL So?

THOMAS Sorry to disappoint I just like the name.

ISOBEL You know you can get stuff for hair loss?

THOMAS I'm not losing my hair.

ISOBEL Oh. Okay.

Tony, I was telling Jackie about that thing you were saying.  
You know.

TONY With the second series.

ISOBEL Yeah exactly, she said you were completely right but she  
had a theory of her own.



TONY            Anyone can have a theory.

ISOBEL        She said to tell you she'll be in The Chequers later to discuss it.

TONY            Good good. You coming?

ISOBEL        Not if you and her want some –

TONY            No no come on, it's not one of those, it's a Thursday, Clangers is there on a Thursday.

ISOBEL        Clangers?

TONY            Yeah yeah.

ISOBEL        I love him! He's so fucking –

                  Oh. Sorry. Clangers is this guy. In the pub.

TONY            Yeah, on Thursdays. Why aren't you – You don't drink do you? Is that why you've never come along?

THOMAS       No one's ever told me.

TONY            What? About Thursdays? Yeah. We must've done. Everyone's there on a – You must've heard everyone talking about it?  
No? Isobel haven't you ever told him?

ISOBEL        I assumed you would've.

TONY            Oh.  
Oh no.  
Thomas.  
I'm sorry.

ISOBEL Well do you want to come tonight?

THOMAS Why are you asking?

ISOBEL You might want to drown your sorrows.

THOMAS Me. Why me? Why not you?

ISOBEL Because you're not staying.  
Here.  
In your job.

THOMAS You don't know that.

ISOBEL Not being funny but –  
Do you want to know what we both know?  
Thomas?  
Do you want to know what we both know?

THOMAS Only if it's very relevant.

ISOBEL You tell him. He believes you. He thinks I'm a bitch.

TONY Isobel was in the corridor two days ago, was it?

ISOBEL Yeah

TONY Yeah on the way back from lunch and she met Mr Carter in the corridor, and he said to her, I don't want you worrying about this procedure, it isn't meant for people like you, which kind of means we know she's through.

ISOBEL Yeah, so then I said well thank you for telling me, it's a weight off my shoulders, you know, phew! And then I said I'm sorry, I know it's a cheeky question but who will I be working with? Out of the other two? Can you tell me sir or is that top secret? And he said well don't tell anyone but it won't be the short flabby one.  
As we established earlier, I think that means you.

THOMAS I'm not short.

ISOBEL You are.

THOMAS I'm really not.

ISOBEL You seem it.

THOMAS He hasn't made a decision. He wouldn't tell you. And he wouldn't say that.

ISOBEL Okay.

But...

He did.

So...

THOMAS He wouldn't.

ISOBEL I was trying to be nice, and tell you the facts in advance but clearly you don't want to know, so fine

THOMAS If I believed it, if I really believed what you're saying I wouldn't stick around would I? I'd just go if I thought I'd lost.

ISOBEL Well yes.

Thought you could save face.

THOMAS Been here two years.

ISOBEL Doesn't seem to mean a thing these days. I've only been here six months and I'm staying on. How weird is that? You never know, you might find another job somewhere, maybe the grass is greener after all and one day you'll be sat in a comfortable chair earning three or four times what you do now with job satisfaction and a beautiful secretary that you've always wanted, with power over your

department and respect from your contemporaries you'll be in that padded engineered chair remembering us and laughing at us, thinking us stupid for still being employed here, compared to what you've achieved, maybe you'll be sat there in that chair thinking how lucky you are you got fired from here, maybe that will happen, maybe that day will come. Or maybe it won't.

THOMAS      You don't know anything. Just a clever way of getting rid of me.

ISOBEL      Fine.

CARTER      Hello hello.

TONY      Mr Carter.

ISOBEL      Hello.

THOMAS      Hello.

CARTER      Yes. I would say I'm sorry I'm late, but I'm not and you knew didn't you, I let Tony know he told you I was running late I assume he told you all my schedule had slipped.

TONY      We've got a problem sir.

CARTER      What?

TONY      We've had a disagreement.

CARTER      Really.

TONY      Just now while we're waiting.

CARTER      Have you?

THOMAS        It's not important.

CARTER        What?

TONY           Thomas you explain.

THOMAS        No you explain Tony.

TONY           Come on, I think it's better if you lay it out.

CARTER        What's the matter?

THOMAS        They were just playing a stupid game.

CARTER        What game?

THOMAS        Tony lifted up his shirt and Isobel said if I put my face against his chest, will you do the same, and she did, but then I didn't want to so I said no, and then they both had a go at me for going back on the deal, but there wasn't really a deal in the first place.

  

CARTER        Why do I need to hear this?

THOMAS        Tony brought it up.

CARTER        Tony?

TONY           Um I think there's been some misunderstanding. I was referring to whether we were supposed to bring supporting paperwork today.

CARTER        Then what's he talking about?

TONY           I... sorry. I really don't know.

CARTER        Isobel?

ISOBEL        Sorry... Thomas you're saying he lifted up his shirt and what? I put my face up against it?

THOMAS      It doesn't matter, it's fine. My mistake. I thought we were talking about something else.

CARTER      Well I haven't got this time to lose to be honest with you talking nothing like this I'm running late and the answer to supposed to bring supporting paperwork is of course, that's what I told you Tony. I told you to make that clear to everyone.

TONY          Fine.

THOMAS      I didn't get that message sir.

CARTER      You haven't got any supporting paperwork?

THOMAS      No.

CARTER      Why not?

THOMAS      I didn't know we were supposed to bring it. I assumed this was just a chat.

CARTER      Tony why didn't you tell him?

TONY          I did sir, I told him, and I emailed. I can probably dig it out if you like.

CARTER      No no it's too late now, let's get on with it, you'll just have to manage... what was your name?

THOMAS      Sir?

CARTER      What was your name I've forgotten.

THOMAS      Thomas.

CARTER      Tom, that's right. Tom.

                So? Come on then, let's have a look at your... thank you.

THOMAS      Do you want me to summarise my figures?

CARTER      What?

THOMAS        Do you want me to tell you what I would've –

CARTER        No no.

These are very good you two.

ISOBEL        Thank you.

TONY           Thank you sir.

CARTER        It's a difficult thing this, you know that, I'm sure you appreciate this, it's always difficult when faced with the need to downsize, when faced with the need to conduct a cull, if I can put it like that, which I think I can, in fact I think that's quite a good word for what we're doing, it's a cull to save the species, by which I mean the rest of us, from extinction, so anyway I've been having these meetings with each team face to face to ask a few questions la la and get the sense, hands on so to speak, as to who should go, you understand, I don't believe in doing this through staring at a graph or just sales figures, or whatever, however impressive they may be, because when it comes down to it you two –

THOMAS        Three.

CARTER        What?

THOMAS        Nothing.

CARTER        When it comes down to it we're people aren't we, all of us, every single one and we should be treated as human beings.

TONY           Absolutely.

ISOBEL        Yes.

THOMAS        Yes.

CARTER Not simply product. And it helps me too, I mean already from being here from being face to face in person, I've already drawn some conclusions, and I'm going to be quite honest in this interview I hope you don't mind, but I'll tell you what they are. Isobel uses her looks to compensate for a certain amount of insecurity, Tony comes from a privileged background I think, from the way he ties his tie, from his shoes from the way he speaks to me, he's used to schoolmasters, he's had a private education, unlike... what was your name?

THOMAS Thomas.

CARTER Tom, who is most definitely a comprehensive boy, comp boy done good nothing wrong with that nothing wrong with that at all, but when it's survival of the fittest I'm afraid there's no room for quotas or positive discrimination or worked his way up or anything like that, it's simply about performance, and presentation. Presentation is important. You can quote me on that please do, Tom you have a stain on your jacket.

THOMAS Oh.

CARTER You should've worn your best one.

But please please sit down, lovely. I might have a little drink, you don't mind do you?

ISOBEL No

TONY No.

THOMAS I'm fine thank you.

CARTER I'm sorry?

THOMAS I'm alright for a drink.

CARTER I wasn't offering.



THOMAS Oh.

CARTER I wasn't offering you a drink, you're still at work, I've had a long morning, I can afford to relax a little, but you're fighting for your jobs, I wasn't suggesting you get drunk, is that what you need Tom a bit of Dutch courage? You can have one if you like but –

THOMAS No. I was saying – no. I'm sorry.

CARTER Alright then. Now.

You don't work well as a team. I've seen your results. The three of you are fine on your own. But bad as a team. Why?

ISOBEL Thomas

TONY Thomas yes.

CARTER Right.

TONY It's his fault sir we can't work with him. It's him that should go, we both agree on that.

CARTER It's my decision.

TONY It's your decision absolutely sir, but we both know Thomas very well, and we thought we'd save you time by giving you the benefit of our experience. Thomas is difficult to work with, he has trouble selling to anyone as his language and presentational skills are non-existent, he often comes into work with dandruff and with breath that smells and these things not only put off clients but are clearly distracting him from the task in hand.

ISOBEL I've also found sir that he has issues with women, I think since his relationship finished six months ago, he's developed a real resentment towards us. He often uses sexist language, and I believe that far from having a professional relationship with me he fantasises about

something sexual a lot of the time and knowing this makes me feel distinctly uncomfortable in his presence.

CARTER Are you uncomfortable now?

ISOBEL Distinctly sir yes.

THOMAS Can I answer all of that sir?

CARTER When we've finished I think you should. So you believe he's simply a bad apple?

TONY An average of ten per cent of employees underperform, and if it wasn't for current employment legislation, would be replaced immediately. I think one of the few benefits of this current recession and consequent redundancies is to clear some of the chaff away and I do believe he is prime chaff, yes. I see no reason for continuing to employ him if you have to reduce the staff by one third, which you do. I think when you've got the three of us here in front of you sir you would have no difficulty making the correct decision. I think by any criteria you would remove the right person.

CARTER You two seem to have this sewn up.

ISOBEL This isn't bias sir, this is simply about business, about sales figures.

THOMAS It's bullying.

TONY You see. That's exactly what we're talking about. He's said one thing in all of this and it's become personal straight away when nothing we were saying was personal at all.

CARTER Bullying?

THOMAS Yes, they just don't like me, this is nothing to do with business.

CARTER            They say they don't get on with you.

THOMAS           That's not my fault.

CARTER           No?

THOMAS           No, they have some thing going on between the two of them and it leaves me out, I think I've been unlucky to be put with them maybe they have a relationship or something I don't know I'm not part of their clique but there's obviously something going on which means all that they've said, their ability to get on with me, is biased and the work of the team is compromised by their personal feelings towards me. I am here to do a job, I'm not here to make friends, but for whatever reason they feel compelled to torment me

CARTER           Torment –

THOMAS           And I've had enough I want to make an official complaint of harassment and bullying –

CARTER           You want to make an official complaint?

THOMAS           Yes absolutely – I can put up with a certain amount but if it's going to get to this, if it's actually going to affect the outcome of something like this –

CARTER           You're making me feel like a schoolteacher Tom.

THOMAS           No. Sir.

CARTER           A babysitter. Like I have to protect you.

THOMAS           No, that's not –

CARTER           You're an adult.

THOMAS           I know.

CARTER           Stand up for yourself.

THOMAS        It's not as simple as that.

TONY            You see sir?

ISOBEL        You see?

THOMAS        I have stood up for myself but –

CARTER        It always has been as simple as that, for me, always worked in my experience, standing up for myself, I never found myself intimidated or put off my work by colleagues I was single-minded.

THOMAS        Well that's you sir, and I'm me, and we're different, and I do try, I'm not bad at my job, I just don't go around sticking knives in people's backs.

CARTER        You think that's what they're doing?

THOMAS        I think so yes, I think this is all basically fun for them, they want to hurt me.

CARTER        Okay okay, look you do realise Tom you're not doing yourself any favours using emotive language like that. Talking about knives and and backs or whatever. They don't look to me as if they are out to hurt you, it looks to me like they are professionals who don't waste time and that maybe you can't keep up with them.

THOMAS        I can. I can keep up, but not when I'm being attacked every –

CARTER        No. No.

THOMAS        Every day when I sit there on the train into work every single day just going over and over, worrying about what's going to happen to me when I come into work whether, I'll overhear them saying something, or whether they'll –

CARTER        Tom

THOMAS        Whether they'll decide to give me the right bits of

information, he didn't tell me about the file today

CARTER Tom

THOMAS I could've prepared the figures if he'd told me but he, they deliberately left me pissing in the fucking –

CARTER Tom

THOMAS Sorry.

CARTER Alright.

You don't work as a team, that's clear.

We don't need to give this any more time.

The two of you are outstanding.

Tom, well, obviously for whatever reason it's not working out for you here, so we're going to let you go. We'll give you official notice on this and so forth, but we're operating a policy that you can leave as soon as you like, and in your case perhaps that's best, if you speak to Pauline in human resources she'll give you the details of the package, but sooner the better I think, yes? I'm sorry this had to happen but there we are. It sounds like we'll all be actually happier in this particular case.

ISOBEL I think so.

TONY Yes.

THOMAS I won't get another job.

CARTER I'm sorry?

THOMAS The way things are at the moment. I won't find something

else. I won't be happier. I want to stay here.

CARTER Doesn't sound like it.

THOMAS This is unfair.

CARTER I'm sorry?

THOMAS I can appeal.

CARTER You can.

THOMAS Right.

CARTER But if you win, and stay, I'll make your life a nightmare because I don't like to be told what I can and can't do. And if you lose, it goes on your record, it affects your reference.

So yes. You can. Appeal.

If you want.

Or you can just go, quietly.

THOMAS

CARTER

THOMAS

CARTER Right.

See you two later.

TONY Short

THOMAS Shut up.

TONY I meant the meeting, the *meeting* was short Jesus, you're so paranoid Thomas. Fuck.

ISOBEL I thought he'd ask a lot more questions.  
TONY Me too.  
ISOBEL But I suppose the decision must've just been really easy.  
TONY Yeah, really obvious.  
ISOBEL Really clear that one of us wasn't up to muster.

Sorry Thomas.

TONY Sorry mate.  
ISOBEL Not your day really is it?  
TONY When is your day?  
Perhaps you've had your day already.

THOMAS Fuck off.

TONY Oooo. Owch.

ISOBEL Shame.

TONY Yeah.

ISOBEL You'd hope for a bit of grace or something.

TONY You'd hope for dignity.

After all this time, working together, as colleagues, you'd hope actually, that he'd understand – that all's fair when it comes down to it. That it's nothing personal, it's just the bottom line. You'd hope he wouldn't hold it against us, and that in fact, maybe, after all this time, we'd have a little hug. Like they do on *The Apprentice*, when one of them's been kicked out. They have a little hug sometimes. Don't they?

Shall we do that?

Thomas?

Come on. Let's have a little hug.

Come on.

Come here.

THOMAS      Fuck off.

TONY        Come on.

You want to.

You do.

There. That's better.

Isn't it?

There.

Okay then.

I'm going to head, got some paperwork to be done this afternoon, you alright if I leave you to...?

ISOBEL      Yeah, you go on, I'm quite able to –

TONY        Mop up yes good. Alright.

See you Thomas, hope you find something soon, I'm sure... I'm sure you will... find something... something... in the end... I'm sure... even you... will find *something*... I mean there are still some jobs that no one wants to do... so you could get one of those... if you need to...

Thomas.

You've still got it.

THOMAS      Right.



TONY I mean it.

THOMAS Yeah thanks. I know.

TONY Good.

Just there. On the right.

You've still got something...

Never mind.

ISOBEL I feel really sorry for you.

THOMAS It's alright you can go.

ISOBEL No Thomas I feel *really* sorry. I do. I promise.  
I do. I'm feeling sorrow. Right now.

You have a kid don't you?

You do.

I know you do.

So.

So you don't need to hide it.

You have a kid.

THOMAS Yeah.

ISOBEL

Yeah. Tough. What's its name?

Is it Harry?

It is Harry.

I know it is.

You know how I know this?

It's because once when we left work, I was walking behind you and you walked all the way down the road, and I could see you in front of me, and I saw you meet this woman in a coffee shop it wasn't a nice coffee shop I was surprised you went into it, it was a Costa or something not even a good one a shit Costa, and I watched you meet this woman and she had a little toddling little thing, and I waited and I saw you go to the loo, and then I ran in and said oh I was hoping to catch you and I pretended I was in a hurry, and I had a little chat with Marion, is that her name your ex and she told me about Harry, and I said I was a colleague and you were taking ages in the toilet actually we talked about it we didn't know what you were up to in there, but it meant we had a good talk about you, and in the end when you still didn't come out I said I needed to dash and I'd catch you tomorrow instead, but that conversation with her gave me quite a lot of crucial information.

Which I've always known when you've tried to hide things or lie or whatever, I've always known about your life things that you don't know I know. I know you have to pay Marion that certain amount every month and when she hears that you're out of work her low estimation of you will drop even further it will I promise she won't be surprised that's the really tragic thing for you, she won't be like oh my God you lost your job! Oh my God! She'll be like, yeah of course he lost his job fucking retard good thing I got out while I could, better not let him see Harry

too much don't want Harry to grow up in the distorted disabled image of his fucking drip drip of a father.

I expect that's what she'll think.

It's tough isn't it, life.

Is it a lot more difficult than you imagined it would be?

I mean I'm sure you thought it was difficult but that through sheer hard work, and practice and training and long hours and inspiration and in your case perspiration you would come through and in the end, succeed, because you thought that despite everything, it was, in this country at least, a meritocracy and that fair play and honest, transparent behaviour at work would be rewarded in the end. That bad people like me would fall at the wayside and good people like you would triumph.

That's what you thought isn't it?

Oops.

THOMAS      Don't you feel any guilt?

ISOBEL      Guilt? No. Sorrow? Yes. Guilt...?

THOMAS      About doing this to me about what you've done you could've just left it in his hands you didn't need to bring me down like that, you've been horrible to me all these months don't you feel –

ISOBEL      No.

THOMAS      You don't feel –

ISOBEL      No.

I don't feel anything like that because I think I know at my heart that if it wasn't me there would be someone else

doing this to you, I think I know in the deepest bit of my heart that actually you bring all of this on yourself I don't behave like this to most people I just let most people get on with their lives or I share a joke or whatever but for some reason with you I feel the need to bring you down I think it might be an evolved thing in a society in a culture, that if we see someone who's going to bring down the whole tribe or whatever someone who's really going to fuck up the rest of us because they're stupid or slow or weak or thin or short or or ugly or has dandruff or something you have the desire somewhere deep within you to take them down first to get rid of them and strengthen the tribe that's all I'm doing with this that's why I'm inexplicably drawn to you all the time poking and poking and poking and poking and poking and poking and poking and being fucking awful to you and you're right we are both of us Tony and me we're really horrible to you, you're not imagining it, it was real, but that's why, because I think it's instinct, and I think it goes on all the time I think it's actually everywhere I think it's actually how things are supposed to be.

I also don't think you'll see much of your son as he grows up because you're right what you said to Carter you won't get another job easily I expect this one was a stretch really when you got it so you know the next one won't come easy and you're not the kind of guy to have lots of friends are you? So you'll probably go home tonight in a minute on your own, call your parents or your best friend and tell them what's happened and they'll be a bit sympathetic but again they won't be surprised and really they'll feel annoyed that now this is on their plate as well, our idiot son who can't keep his job, my best mate, who I made friends with at school –

Woah woah, that was lashing out. Hey you nearly hit me physically physical violence against a woman, lucky I do my self-defence classes, you could've hurt me if I wasn't lithe and brilliant.

THOMAS      Fuck off.

ISOBEL      Have another go, try and hit me again.

No, missed. Again.

Missed.

I'm like a cat. I prance, I jump, I'm like a Soviet gymnast, I'm really perfect physically and mentally, you ever noticed that, people with good clear physically fit bodies tend to have the minds to match. Your brain is a bit weedy, and short.

Missed again.

Again!

And again!

Tired yet?

THOMAS      Leave me alone.

ISOBEL      One last go.

Go on.

Okay.

Okay.

Ooo!

Ow.

Careful.

Owch. Are you alright?

Eek.

Okay. Um...

Look, I'm just going to leave you here, alright but... wait.

Before I do.

There.

We clubbed together this morning in the office and got you this. It's single malt. Islay Whisky. We had a feeling it would be you who'd be going and we thought we'd save time... oh.

But you don't drink, do you?

Oh.

Do you want it anyway?

Because you might want to start?

When you wake up.

A drink might be just the thing.

Okay?

Thomas?

Yes?

Right.

We didn't bother with a card. Didn't have much to say.  
Most of them couldn't remember who you were... so...  
I'll just leave the whisky here.

Good luck.

*End.*

## MIKE BARTLETT

Mike Bartlett's plays include *Medea* (Glasgow Citizens/Headlong); *Chariots of Fire* (based on the film; Hampstead/West End); *13* (National); *Love, Love, Love* (Paines Plough/Plymouth Drum/Royal Court); *Earthquakes in London* (Headlong/National); *Cock* (Royal Court/Off-Broadway); *Artefacts* (Nabokov/Bush); *Contractions* and *My Child* (Royal Court). He is currently Associate Playwright at Paines Plough, was Writer-in-Residence at the National Theatre in 2011, and at the Royal Court Theatre in 2007. *Cock* won an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre in 2009. *Love, Love, Love* won the TMA Best New Play award in 2011.

Directing credits include *Medea* (Glasgow Citizens/Headlong); *Honest* (Northampton Royal & Derngate); *Class* (Tristan Bates).

He has written seven plays for BBC Radio, winning the Writer's Guild Tinniswood and Imison prizes for *Not Talking*, and his three-part television series, *The Town*, was broadcast on ITV1 in 2012.



## **A Nick Hern Book**

*Bull* first published in Great Britain in 2013 as a paperback original by Nick Hern Books Limited, The Glasshouse, 49a Goldhawk Road, London W12 8QP, in association with Sheffield Theatres

This ebook edition first published in 2013

*Bull* copyright © 2013 Mike Bartlett

Mike Bartlett has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work

Cover image: © Mackey Creations, used under licence from Shutterstock.com

Cover design: Nick Hern Books, London

Typeset by Nick Hern Books, London

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 78001 190 5 (ebook edition)

ISBN 978 1 84842 280 3 (print edition)

**CAUTION** This ebook is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorised distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's and publisher's rights, and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

**Amateur Performing Rights** Applications for performance, including readings and excerpts, by amateurs in English should be addressed to the Performing Rights Manager, Nick Hern Books, The Glasshouse, 49a Goldhawk Road, London W12 8QP, *tel* +44 (0)20 8749 4953, *e-mail* [info@nickhernbooks.co.uk](mailto:info@nickhernbooks.co.uk), except as follows:

*Australia:* Dominie Drama, 8 Cross Street, Brookvale 2100, *tel* (+2) 9938 8686 *fax* (2) 9938 8695, *e-mail* [drama@dominie.com.au](mailto:drama@dominie.com.au)

*New Zealand:* Play Bureau, PO Box 420, New Plymouth, *tel* (+6) 757 3103, *e-mail* [play.bureau.nz@xtra.co.nz](mailto:play.bureau.nz@xtra.co.nz)

*South Africa:* DALRO (pty) Ltd, PO Box 31627, 2017 Braamfontein, *tel* (11) 712 8000, *fax* (11) 403 9094, *e-mail* [theatricals@dalro.co.za](mailto:theatricals@dalro.co.za)

*United States of America and Canada:* The Agency (London) Ltd, see details below

**Professional Performing Rights** Applications for performance by professionals in any medium and in any language throughout the world (and amateur and stock performances in the United States of America and Canada) should be addressed to The Agency (London) Ltd, 24 Pottery Lane, Holland Park, London W11 4LZ, *fax* +44 (0)20 7727 9037, *e-mail* [info@theagency.co.uk](mailto:info@theagency.co.uk)

No performance of any kind may be given unless a licence has been obtained. Applications should be made before rehearsals begin. Publication of this play does not necessarily indicate its availability for amateur performance.